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POLITICAL CIRCUIT
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Son Tay raid -- an escalation that hampers US policy

CPYRGHT

Pigs with President Kennedy, the Pueblo with President Johnson, and now the U-2 again with President Nixon.

It is difficult to separate the CIA from the military in this sense.

In Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s "A Thousand Days" he wrote that President Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs episode felt that dealing with Allan Dulles, then head of the CIA, was difficult. Schlesinger quoted Kennedy as saying, "It's hard to deal with legendary figures." Further, "it's a hell of a way to learn things. I have learned one thing in this business; that is that you have to deal with the CIA. MacNamara (then Secretary of Defense) has dealt with defense. Fusk has done a lot with the State. But no one has dealt with the CIA."

The problem for the President is that he must weigh both the practical value of military or an intelligence operation such as the one in Vietnam and the result of this operation in terms of long range policy.

The policy of the government, as stated by the President, is to end the war in Vietnam and to some extent he has moved towards this although there are still more than 350,000 men in Vietnam.

Cambodia and Son Tay may look rough from a practical point of view but they do not do much for furthering the US policy of getting our troops out of Vietnam.

WASHINGTON -- It is very difficult to argue against the proposition that the quickest and best way to effect the release of American prisoners of war in North Vietnam is to withdraw all our forces from Vietnam and end the fighting there.

It is equally difficult to object to the raid at Son Tay in North Vietnam because it involves the lives of American soldiers who are prisoners of war and it involves the families of these men who would give just about anything to have them back. No one can fault them for that.

But neither can one call the invasion by a small band of American commando type soldiers on the village of Son Tay in North Vietnam anything but an escalation of the war which could lead to further deaths of American soldiers and more prisoners of war and more suffering for the families of these soldiers. And for what?

There's the threat by Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird that he would recommend to President Nixon resumption of full scale air attacks on North Vietnam if the enemy engaged in major violations of the tacit understanding with the United States which resulted in the halt to the bombing two years ago.

This again is an escalation of the war which could lead to further deaths of American soldiers and more prisoners of war and more suffering for the families of these soldiers. And for what?

The real question that the Nixon administration never seems to ask itself is whether our military presence in Southeast Asia is going to make any real difference 5 or 10 years after we depart from that land.

And depart we must, despite the election results or the consequences to some President.

Essentially what we are doing in South Vietnam is securing a government which without our help might not be able to secure itself with its own people. And when we are gone they are gone.

It is easy to confuse the bold and daring of the commando type operation with the results of the mission.

The mission was a failure. Secretary Laird can give the American public a very glamorous picture of the operation--of how they made their landing in the dark, of how they entered the compound. But in the end, through faulty intelligence, there were no American prisoners of war in the camp. That happened to be the central point of the mission.

Further, there is that old mystique of the military, vis-a-vis the President. This is not to criticize the military. They have their jobs to do and certainly some of it involves intelligence. The President, by failing to say no to the military, has had

There is the record of the U-2 with President Eisenhower, the Bay of